DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 397 CS 506 296

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TITLE Helping Developmental Students Overcome Communication Apprehension.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (73rd, Boston, MA, November 5-8, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Anxiety; Cognitive Measurement; *Cognitive Restructuring; *Communication Apprehension; *Communication Skills; Curriculum Development; *Desensitization; Evaluation Methods; *High Risk Students
IDENTIFIERS *Developmental Students; *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

ABSTRACT

Since 20% of all college students experience communication apprehension (CA), the developmental student, distinguished by lower than average academic scores, may also experience this inhibiting fear of communication. Characteristics of the developmental communication apprehensive student indicate that a program for overcoming communication apprehension should include individual assessment for each developmental student and a structured alleviation curriculum. Alleviation of communication apprehension, whether related to conditioned anxiety, negative cognitive appraisal, or skills deficit, may be approached through systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, and goal setting. Assessment inventories for types of communication concerns, such as the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24, may influence a decision as to whether or not high-scoring students might be candidates for the developmental CA alleviation program. Use of alleviation techniques, such as systematic desensitization cognitive modification and goal setting are helpful when applied according to individual concerns. Appropriate materials to help alleviate CA, such as Robert Mager's "Goal Analysis," or Gerald M. Phillips and Nancy Mitzger's "The Reticent Syndrome: Some Theoretical Considerations about Etiology and Treatment," are available. (Twenty-nine references are attached.) (RAE)

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Helping Developmental Students Overcome Communication Apprehension

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Running Head: DEVELOPMENTAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Since twenty per cent of college students experience communication apprehension, the developmental student, distinguished by lower than average academic scores, may also experience this inhibiting fear of communicating. Characteristics of the developmental communication apprehensive student indicate a program for overcoming communication apprehension should include individual assessment for each developmental student and a structured alleviation curriculum. Alleviation of communication apprehension, whether related to conditioned anxiety, negative cognitive appraisal, or skills deficit, may be approached through systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, and goal setting. Assessment inventories for types of communication concerns, directions for alleviation techniques, and appropriate materials are discussed.

Helping Developmental Students Overcome Communication Apprehension

Introduction

Changes in student characteristics during the past twenty years have caused academic programs in higher education to include programs for the developmental, underprepared, and remedial student (Plisko & Stern, 1985). These students may be distinguished more by their low academic test scores than any other single measure, including race, sex, and socioeconomic status (Platt, 1986). Communication apprehension, (CA) the fear of participating in oral communication, is found to effect fifteen to twenty per cent of the college population. Researchers suggest CA to be negatively corelated with personality characteristics, to affect academic and demographic choices, and to have an impact on students' attitude and achievement (McCroskey, 1977). Of the twenty to thirty per cent of the academic enrollment that comprises developmental students, those developmental students who experience communication apprehension may have even more difficulty with academic success. This paper explores the characteristics of the developmental student who is inhibited by communication apprehension and provides a teaching unit for help those with CA to deal with it.

The Developmental Communicative Apprehensive Student

Research shows that all developmental students do not experience communication apprehension, nor do all communication

apprehensive students exhibit the criteria of developmental students (Watson, 1982). The developmental student is definied primarily by low academic aptitude and achievement, whereas amount of fear of oral communication distinguishes the CA student. Additional differences suggest CA to be unrelated to intelligence (Davis & Scott, 1978), while the developmental student is found to exhibit relatively low cognitive skills (Barna, Haws, & Knefelkamp, 1978).

Although no causal relationship between similar characteristics of the developmental and communicative apprehensive student has been found or is here implied, a comparison of the two student types reveals some meaningful similarities. The developmental communication apprehensive student generally has lower than average achievement (McCroskey & Andersen, 1976; Rouche & Snow, 1977), includes minority populations, (Phillips & Butt, 1966; Plisko & Stern, 1985) and frequently drops out of school (Jaschik, 1985; McCroskey & Payne, 1986).

Personal characteristics of the student who is both developmental and communication apprehensive suggests specific difficulties in accomplishment in the academic setting. This student tends to lack confidence in him or herself and his or her personal academic ability (Barna, Haws, & Knenfelkamp, 1978; McCroskey, Daly, & Sorensen, 1976)). As a consequence, he or she develops a poor attitude toward learning, and this attitude results in low academic motivation (DeBoer, 1983; Hurt, Preiss, and Davis, 1976). This student has found learning to be difficult and unrewarding and does not look forward to a repetition of failure. Low tolerance for ambiguity, lack of external self-

control, dogmatism, and dependency on the authority figure contribute to the student's need for structure (Barna, Haws, Knefelkamp, 1976; McCoskey, Daly, & Sorensen, 1976). Although the student may be eager for structured learning experiences and assistance of the instructor, the student is hesitant and fearful to ask for this help (Rouche & Snow, 1977; Scott, Yates, & Wheeless, 1975). In view of these characteristics, a program for assisting the developmental student to overcome communication apprehension should include individual communication apprehension assessment for each developmental student and a structured alleviation curriculum.

Communication Apprehension Assessment for the Developmental Student

Since certain research findings (Watson, 1982) preclude the assumption that all developmental students experience CA, students in the developmental program should first be assessed as to amounts of CA. Communication apprehension is most often measured by the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (McCroskey, 1982), a 24-item, self-report scale that measures concern about communication in the contexts of conversation, meetings, group discussion, and public speaking. The PRCA-24 has a scoring range of 1-124. Those students scoring 86 or above may experience above average CA. To make a decision as to whether or not high-scoring students are candidates for the developmental CA alleviation program, an instructor interview with the student to determine his or her concerns about communication and willingness to participate in the alleviation program will promote a joint

decision between student and instructor.

Alleviation of Types of Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension alleviation techniques are directed toward the types of speech concern experienced by the subject, whether as a result of conditioned anxiety, negative cognitive appraisal, or skills deficit (Glaser, 1981). Alleviation of conditioned anxiety is approached through systematic desensitization (McCroskey, 1972), and negative cognitive appraisal is remedied through cognitive modification (Watson and Dodd, 1984). Systematic desensitization (SD), a method of behavior therapy, is based on the principle of reciprocal inhibition where fear is reduced by pairing aversive stimuli with relaxation (Wolpe and Lazarus, 1966). Found to be effective in reducing conditioned speech anxiety (McCroskey, 1972), SD is composed of training in deep muscle relaxation, construction of anxiety hierarchies, and the counterposing of relaxation and anxiety provoking stimuli from the hierarchies. CA students may be guided orally by an instructor or may listen to an audio-tape program to learn these techniques.

Second, to cope with negative cognitive appraisal, cognitive modification, an unbrella term for a number of procedures emphasizing the important effects of thoughts or cognitions on behaviors and feelings, is based on Ellis' initial work on rational emotive therapy (1962). Fremouw and Scott (1979) found cognitive modification to reduce speech anxiety by analyzing and challenging negative thoughts about self, others, and communication and evaluating the impact of these thoughts on feelings and behavior in communication situations.

Third, Phillips and Solokoff's description of reticence advances the notion that anxiety is not the basis of dysfunctional communication and treatment should be directed toward the modification of particular skill behaviors (1979). Rhetoritherapy, or skills development, includes a description of the student's behavior, how others respond to him or her, the setting of communication goals, and development of related speech skills training.

After reviewing present methods of treatment research, those to alleviate conditioned anxiety, negative cognitive appraisal, and skills deficit, Glazer (1981) makes the following recommendations: (1) amounts of CA should be carefully measured; (2) multiple assessment is needed; (3) instructors need to provide treatment procedures most effective with particular individuals; (4) follow-up assessment is necessary. Effective methods for overcoming these definitions of speech concern have been developed for individuals (Watson, 1986) and semester courses (Kelly and Watson, 1986; Phillips, 1977).

To determine individual types of concern about communication students may experience, certain pencil and paper inventories are administered. The PRCA-24 score may be used for information about the amount of general anxiety toward communiction as well as the particular context of the anxiety. For amounts of negative cognitive appraisal, The Expressed Acceptance of Self Scale (Robinson and Shaver, 1973) measures amounts of reasonable and unreasonable concerns about self-evaluation and evaluation by others. The need for development of specific communication skills

may be measured by a comprehensive skills check list such as offered by Kelly and Watson, (1984). To measure changes in concern about communication after use of alleviation techniques, all inventories may again be administered and pre and posttest scores compared.

Once the student in need of the CA alleviation program is determined, and types of concern for communication are designated, a Personal Communicator Profile can be developed The profile will contain scores from the three inventories, the range (high or low) from each inventory, and areas in need of improvement. From the designated areas of improvement, an individual CA alleviation plan is designed. The instructor may want to keep an Individual Assignment Sheet upon which to write student names and notations of assignments in systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, or goal setting.

Any one or a combination of alleviation techniques may be needed and can be accomplished. For example, if a student needs improvement in negative cognitive appraisal and also systematic desensitization, reading, thinking, and pencil activities can be assigned for outside of class learning of reasonable thinking. Systematic desensitization can be accomplished by listening to tapes in the library and by individual practice. After learning to write behavioral goals to facilitate skills accomplishment, students can use goals to learn needed communication skills in and outside of class.

Directions for Alleviation Techniques

In a beginning session with developmental communication apprehensive students, the instructor explains the meaning of

communication apprehension and how it can result from conditioned anxiety, negative cognitive appraisal, and/or skills deficit and how systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, and goal setting can help overcome concerns about communication. Then the instructor gives an overview of how the alleviation techniques will be accomplished, whether individually or in groups. For individuals, the instructor can work with students periodically in thirty-minute conferences. In groups, students can discuss similar activities, then submit assignments individually. The group sessions will afford a rich opportunity for expression and interaction.

Systematic Desensitization

1. Instructor Preparation: The instructor may plan to guide the student(s) through the technique during each of six sessions, or may choose to use audio-tapes.

2. Systematic Desensitization: For control of conditioned speech anxiety, the instructor explains conditioning, counterconditioning and the relaxation technique, development of the hierarchy, and combining the two.

3. Relaxation Technique: The instructor directs the relaxation techniques or plays the first audio-tape. Students are given a printed sequence of the relaxation steps and assigned to practice the procedure twice daily. Directions for use of the succeeding tapes are given or the instructor procedes to the next stage.

4. Development of hierarchies: The instructor helps students develop hierarchies, the steps that lead to a feared communication situation. The situation may be determined from high scoring

areas on the PRCA-24 (group discussion, meeting, conversation, public speaking).

5. Combining Relaxation and Imagery: After learning the relaxation technique, students begin to imagine hierarchy scenes, one at a time while being relaxed.

6. Written Assignment: The instructor has prepared a booklet which contains a printed sequence of the relaxation techniques, a chart for recording times the relaxation was practiced, and a reaction sheet for each session or week of the program.

Suggested materials: For a description of classroom procedures for all alleviation techniques see: Lynne Kelly and Arden K. Watson (1986) Speaking With Confidence and Skill, Harper and Row, 10 E. 53rd St., New NY 10022. Audio-tapes: James W. Lohr (1976), Building Speech Confidence, National Textbook Co., Skokie, IL 60076.

Cognitive Modification

1. Explanation of Theory: For the control of negative cognitive appraisal, cognitive modification helps understand unreasonable beliefs about communication and how to change those beliefs.

2. Brown Bag: In an opening activity students are asked to think of one thought or belief about themselves, others, and a communication event. They write the statement and place it in the brown bag. The instructor has placed additional statements in the bag.

3. Reasonable and Unreasonable Beliefs: Thoughts are tested by asking (1) Is it true? (2) Does it represent a desire rather than a demand? (3) Does it result in moderate emotion? (4) Does it help attain goals? If all answers are "yes," the thought or

belief is reasonable. If a majority of the answers are 'no,' the thought or belief is unreasonable. The thinking of the person who has the belief causes the belief to be reasonable or unreasonable. Other people or outside forces do not cause beliefs to be reasonable or unreasonable. The instructor then draws a statement from the brown bag and tests it with the four questions. Unreasonable: I must give my speech perfectly, and everyone must like it. Reasonable: It would be nice to give my speech without mistakes and to have most listeners like it.

3. Students practice testing statements from the brown bag. Lists of reasonable and unreasonable beliefs are written on the board. During this activity, students are encouraged to understand how they choose beliefs about self, others, and communication as a result of the way they perceive the communication event.

4. Categories of Unreasonable Beliefs: (1) Statements of evaluation of human worth, either of oneself or of others. Unreasonable: Because I feel anxious, I am an inadequate person. Reasonable: My apprehension does not mean that I am an inadequate person. (2) Need statements-arbitrary requirements for happiness or survival. Unreasonable: If I don't do well when I lead my group discussion, I'll be miserable. Reasonable: Doing a good job at leading the group discussion is not necessary for me to be happy. (3) 'Awfulizing' statements-exaggerating the negative consequences of a situation. Unreasonable: It is terrible to feel so apprehensive about a job interview. Reasonable: It is inhibiting to feel so apprehensive about a job interview. (4)

Words that reflect unrealistic demands on events and individuals. Unreasonable: I **must** be able to talk easily with members of the opposite sex. **Reasonable:** I would enjoy talking more easily with members of the opposite sex.

After the instructor explains the categories, students draw statements from the brown bag, determine whether or not the statement is unreasonable and if so, into which category it fits.

4. Change Unreasonable Beliefs: The A-B-C model of reasonable thinking includes: A, the Activating event: 'I gave a speech and forgot part of it,'; B, Belief: 'What a dummy I am,'; C, Consequences: embarrassment, self-doubt; D, Disputing: use the four tests of unresonable thinking; E, Effect: new philosophy, thoughts, attitude.

Example of the ABC Model

A-Activating Event	B-Beliefs
I was reading an article to my health class, when I lost my place and had to start over.	Unreasonable- It was awful to forget. I'll always forget. I can't stand the embarassment. Reasonable-It was unfortunate that I forgot where I was. I wish I had remembered where I where I was. I don't like forgetting.

C-Consequences	D-Disputing Beliefs
Irrational-Absolute command, worthlessness Rational-Regret, frustration	Nothing makes it awful to forget where I was, but it was inconvenient. I won't always forget where I am when I am reading. I will be able to stand the embarassment.

Effect of Reasonable Thinking

I feel regret, but I know I'm not perfect. I was frustrated, but I didn't feel worthless. I will read an article aloud again. I

will practice my skills more.

5. Practice Changing Unreasonable Beliefs: Students use the model to examine statements drawn from the brown bag.

6. Log of Unreasonable Beliefs: For one day students record unreasonable beliefs about self, others, and communication.

7. Written Assignment: Students are assigned to complete a certain number of A-B-C models to analyze beliefs. They are encouraged to analyze their beliefs about personal and class communication encounters.

Suggested materials: Albert Ellis and Robert A. Harper (1978), A New Guide to Rational Living, Wilshire Book Co., 12015 Sherman Road, No. Hollywood, CA. 91605; Susan R. Walen, Raymond Digiuseppe, and Richard L. Wessler (1980), A Pratitioner's Guide to Rational Emotive Therapy, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 10021.

Goal Setting

1. Examining the technique: To overcome skills deficit, goal setting is a procedure to help manage behavior and learn communication skills. Steps in goal setting consist of: (1) defining goal areas, (2) formulating specific goal statements in behavioral terms, (3) writing criteria for success, (4) listing steps for prepration and implementation, and (5) planning for contingencies.

2. Abstract and Specific Goal Setting: The instructor explains the ineffectiveness of the abstract as compared to the specific goal setting plan:

Abstract Goal Setting Plan	Specific Goal Setting Plan
Step 1. Define goal areas:	Step 1. Define goal areas:

Be a better speaker.	Be a better speaker.
Step 2. Formulate specific goal statements: Learn to be a better conversationalist.	Step 2. Formulate specific goal statements: Learn to start, continue, and end a converstation.
Step 3. Write criteria for success: I want the listener to like me.	Step 3. Write criteria: I will introduce myself and say three things to a girl.
Step 4. List steps in preparation and implementation: The next time I have a chance I will talk with an attractive person.	Step 4. List steps: Monday, Sept. 25, in English class, I will talk to that blonde. I will go to class early. To start, I will say a friendly 'hello' and ask how the person like the class. To end, I'll say,'Nice to meet you. If we have any class problems, let's get together.'
Step 5. Plan for contingencies: I'll think of some ideas.	Step 5. Plan for contingencies: If the person is not there on Monday, I'll start the conversa-

tion on Wednesday. If I don't get an answer, I will talk with someone else.

3. Abstract and Specific Terms: Using a list of communication goals, students are asked to decide which goal is abstract or specific, to underline specific terms, and to rewrite abstract goals with behavioral terms. Examples: Abstract: Be able to talk with enthusiasm. Specific: While talking, I will use gestures, smile, and speak with an expressive voice. Abstract: Be a good speaker. Specific: I will speak extemporaneously from an outlined speech that is supported with factual evidence.

4. Goal Setting Plan: Using the five steps described in No. 1, students develop a plan for performing a communication goal.

5. Written Assignment: Students are assigned a number of goals to complete according to high scores on the context areas of the PRCA-24 and need that was shown on the communication skills check-list.

Students complete the goal setting plan, have it approved by the instructor, complete the behavioral goal, and write a goal setting report. The report should include these steps: (1) goal area, (2) specific goal statements performed, (3) criteria for success met, (4) description of procedure performed, (5) results of performing the goal.

Suggested materials: Robert Mager, Goal Analysis, (1972) Fearon Pitman Publishers, Inc., 6 Davis Drive, Belmont, CA 94002; Gerald M. Phillips and Nancy Mitzger (1973), The Reticent Syndrome: Some Theoretical Considerations about Etiology and Treatment, Speech

Monographs, 40, 220-230.

Conclusion

Many colleges and universities are now offering program for the developmental, or academically deficient, student. A percentage of these students also experience communication apprehension, the fear of oral communication. This fear may prevent the developmental student from communicating adequately with instructors and peers, academically and socially.

A teaching unit for alleviation of communication apprehension is based on individual assessment of communication apprehension and use of alleviation techniques according to individual communication concerns. The unit is founded on communication research and modelled after successful classroom programs. Developmental instructors may easily incorporate the communication apprehension alleviation unit into developmental classes.

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